

New data shows surge in telehealth consults amidst COVID-19 pandemic

June 8 2020

Australians have seen a huge increase in telehealth consults since the outbreak of COVID-19 after University of Queensland researchers crunched the numbers from Medicare.

In total, 1.1 million telehealth consultations were delivered in March with more than 56,000 [mental health services](#) given by phone or [video conference](#).

The launch of [Australia's first webpage](#) reporting Medicare's telehealth activity provides information on how people use Medicare-funded telehealth appointments to access [general practice](#), allied health, psychiatry and nursing consults.

UQ Centre for Online Health Director Professor Anthony Smith said researchers have turned raw Medicare data into easy-to-understand information for busy health professionals, the [general public](#), government, health service researchers and health insurance agencies.

The new webpage includes graphs and infographics to distinguish between usual in-person consultations and appointments conducted via video or telephone.

"This data will improve our understanding of how telehealth is adopted around the country, particularly during health crises," Professor Smith said.

"The current pandemic has accelerated the use of telehealth in Australia and the world.

"Telehealth has demonstrated that certain services can be easily dealt with by telephone or videoconference."

Data shows there was a 10-fold increase in telehealth specialist consultations, rising from 16,000 to 161,000 in March.

Of those, 91 percent of consultations were delivered by phone and the remainder in video consultations.

Professor Smith said telehealth is the way of the future because it provides convenient and timely access to [health care](#).

"We can reach people who are unable to travel or live in [remote areas](#), as well as triage cases to determine if a face-to-face appointment is required," he said.

The webpage will enable Australia to plan for routine use of telehealth in our health system going forward.

"Our focus now is to ensure the right systems are in place for telehealth to become sustainable long-term in conjunction with in-person consultations," Professor Smith said.

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: New data shows surge in telehealth consults amidst COVID-19 pandemic (2020, June 8) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-surge-telehealth-covid19-pandemic.html>

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